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**BRATTLEBORO**  
**BASEBALL**  
at Island Park  
1911-1915

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Seamus Kearney

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P.O. BOX 6392  
BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT 05302

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THERE IS LITTLE TO INFORM MOTORISTS crossing the bridges between Brattleboro and Hinsdale that the tiny island in the Connecticut River once held more than three thousand people watching a league championship baseball game between Brattleboro and Keene. It's hard to imagine that what is now such a small parcel of land was a popular pleasure spot to many thousands of New Englanders over a span of 16 years. And it's unbelievable that the now untidy island could have accommodated such crowds in a superb entertainment facility that billed itself as the "Home of Clean Amusement." But it's true.

The story of how the island drew people in such numbers is a story of a time when Brattleboro had high hopes for a future of progress and growth in the Connecticut River Valley. It's also a tale of how baseball contributed to Brattleboro's progressive spirit, a spirit for which the town was famous in the early twentieth century.

The island's baseball history dates to the 1880s, a time when the island was much bigger (nearly 30 acres). The ground was level and flat, unlike the hilly terrain of either riverside. Amateur and pick-up games were frequent. Seating was haphazard, but it improved in 1902 when a small, uncovered grandstand was constructed. An amateur club, the Brattleboro Athletics, played regularly on the ballfield there, but not in a league arrangement.

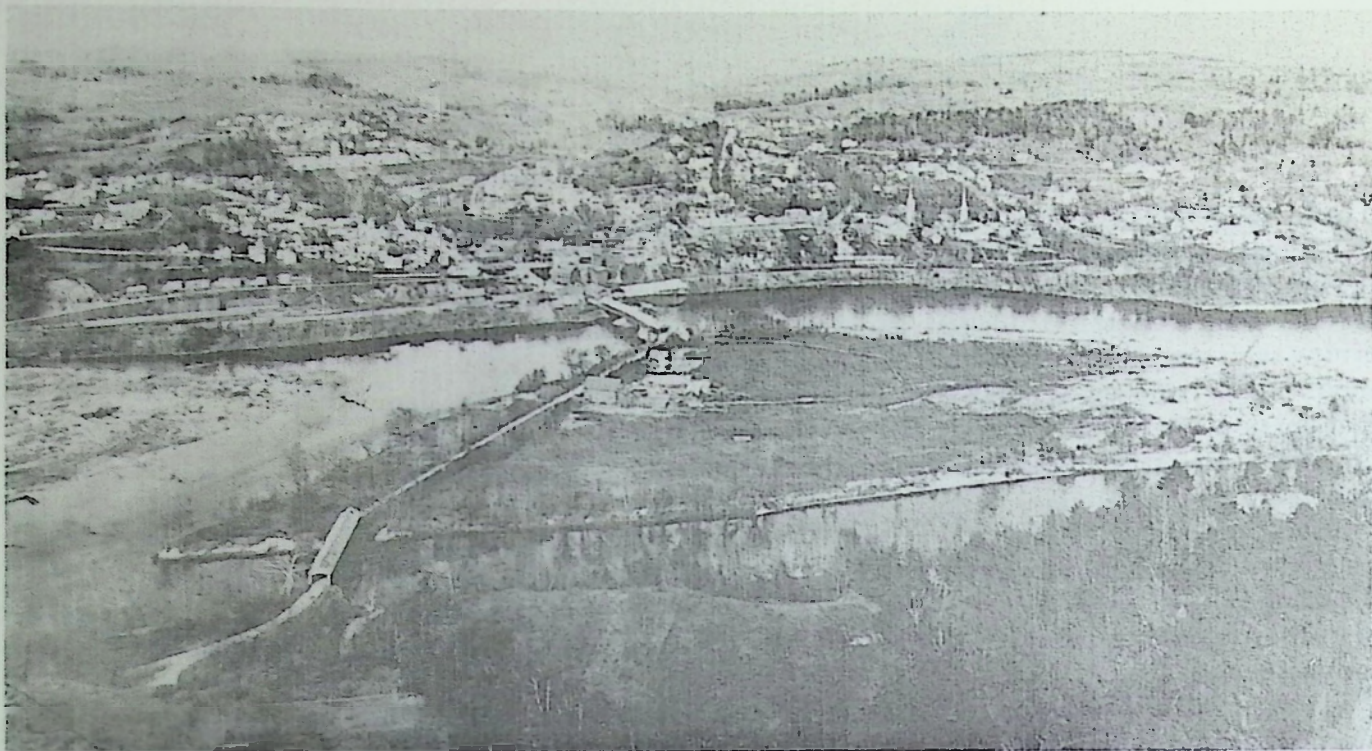
The last time Brattleboro had participated in organized, league-style baseball on the island was in an amateur league with other Valley towns from 1890 to 1893. Dwindling interest and poor attendance ended the league after the 1893 season. But by 1910 competitive baseball between the towns was again becoming popular, and if there was to be a new league, they needed a new place to play. They got it in spades.

On October 14, 1910, Brattleboro's two weekly papers, *The Brattleboro Reformer* and *The Vermont Phoenix*, informed readers that George Fox and Michael Moran would erect an amusement pavilion named Island Park on the island in the Connecticut River opposite the bustling Vermont village. Included in the plans were a grandstand seating 1,200, a dance hall, and a baseball field. Local contractor George Croll would erect the wooden pavilion. "If you build it, they will come," the famous phrase of W.P. Kinsella, author of the novel which became the film "Field of Dreams," was about to be tested before its time.

But, while Kinsella's fictional park enticed Shoeless Joe Jackson and teammates back from the dead, Fox and Moran merely hoped to lure baseball fans into their attractive, new facility on the island. They hoped Island Park would become the town's amusement centerpiece, but the pavilion became more than that. Island Park caused the birth of the Twin State Professional Baseball League, became New England's play palace, and boosted Brattleboro's prestige in the Connecticut River Valley. All this on an island that had an unsavory reputation in the minds of many Vermonters.

Actually located within the town limits of Hinsdale, New Hampshire, and outside the restriction of Brattleboro's temperance ordinance, the island housed illegal taverns. Temperance existed in Hinsdale also, but enforcement





*Above, looking toward Brattleboro from Mount Wantastiquet, we see the large size of the island in the late 1800s, before the river and dam reduced it. Below, during the 1890s, there was ample room for a baseball diamond. (Photo below by Charles Akeley)*





was loose because six miles separated the town's center from the island. The taverns' illegal liquor drew roisterers looking for action and off-duty train crews from nearby Brattleboro station. It also tempted Brattleboreans, thirsty for forbidden refreshment, to sneak over the bridge. The island was especially rowdy during the annual log drives on the river.

Fox and Moran were Brattleboro residents and progressive businessmen. George Fox was president of the Board of Trade, a store owner, and an impresario managing shows at the Auditorium in the old Town Hall. Michael Moran was the co-owner of a funeral parlor and an entrepreneur. Both men were well respected, involved in local progressive enterprises, and interested in boosting Brattleboro.

They announced that their Island Park Amusement Company's venture would be solely for the wholesome entertainment sought by every good citizen in the Valley. Their facility, they said, would offer clean amusement. They would not tolerate any other. If they could achieve that goal, Island Park would change the island's reputation and become a symbol of what Brattleboro's famous progressive spirit could accomplish.

Despite its small size (8,500 people in 1912), Brattleboro had a reputation for progress in the area. The *Reformer* frequently boasted that Brattleboro was the most progressive town in Vermont. The upstate *Morrisville News and Citizen* agreed, when it congratulated the town's decision to fund a new railroad station in 1912:

"For progressiveness and enterprise the town of Brattleboro is at the head of Vermont towns, and we are quite sure that in all New England there is not a town that shows the public spirit that is manifested by the town of Brattleboro, Vermont."



Log drives in the spring moved as many as 40 million board feet of timber down the river, creating frequent hazards. This view from Walnut Street shows a logjam in 1902.



### **A corking place for good, clean fun**

Public interest in Fox and Moran's project was intense, ensuring Island Park's influence even as it began. The owners had said in 1909 that they had no interest in starting a baseball team but that they thought it would be good if one were formed and played in a league with other Valley towns. The beginning of construction in November, 1910, kindled baseball fever in Brattleboro. By December 8, the high fever propelled baseball enthusiasts to meet at Brattleboro's prestigious hotel, the Brooks House, where they formed a committee to consider a team.

Expansively, like melting winter snows, Brattleboro's new park attracted interest in the Connecticut Valley – little rills at first but then a flood. Bellows Falls, Vermont, and Keene, New Hampshire, formed baseball associations in mid December. At a New Year's Eve meeting of the three associations at the Rockingham Hotel in Bellows Falls, the associations agreed to form a league if they could get a fourth to join. Messages were dispatched to several Connecticut Valley towns in Massachusetts urging them to form baseball associations of their own.

All winter, talk about a new league perked and bubbled but nothing was accomplished until spring. Much of the delay was caused by the town associations' inability to decide on a weekly team salary limit. The competitive associations were naturally suspicious of each other and had difficulty devising a way to guarantee balanced competition. Nevertheless, the reality of Island Park's construction, coupled with rising baseball fever in each town, eventually prevailed.

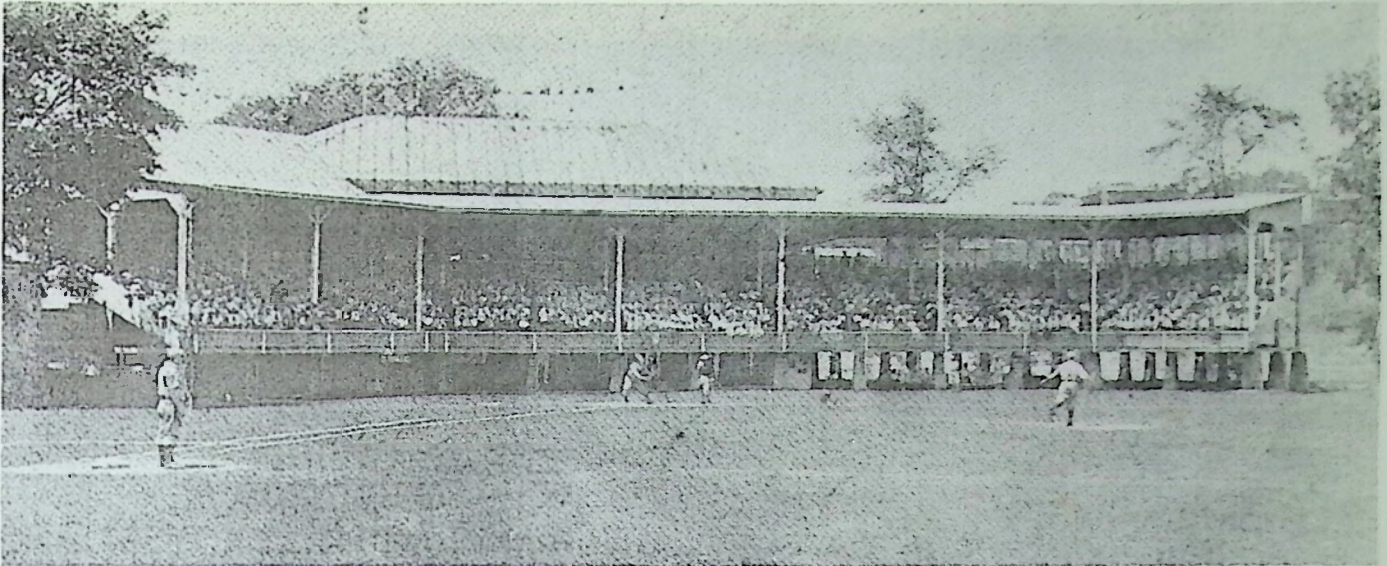
At the Rockingham Hotel, the three baseball associations were joined on March 11, 1911, by a Springfield, Vermont-Charlestown, New Hampshire, hybrid (immediately dubbed "The Hyphens") and founded the Twin State Baseball League. The Twin State was a professional league with rules and with paid officers, umpires, and players. The associations agreed to play a 36-game schedule with the league's inaugural game at Island Park. The Brattleboro Baseball Association's entry was named, appropriately, "The Islanders."

Interest in the new baseball facility was just as profound as interest in the league. The first Sunday after framing of the structure began in February, 1911, almost a thousand people visited the island. Hundreds did the same every Sunday thereafter. The pavilion's owners pledged a structure that would meet the entertainment needs of all area residents. Dancing, boating, plays, and moving pictures, in addition to baseball, would be offered. In the slang of the era, Fox and Moran promised a corking place for good, clean fun, and people came to witness its creation.

The grand opening of Island Park on June 28 drew more than 2,000 people. The pavilion was resplendent in various shades of green paint and lighted with 400 light bulbs (a big deal at the time). Inside, a 250-seat balcony overlooked a ballroom dance floor of rock maple that measured 84 by 48 feet. A wide veranda flanked the ballroom on the west, the river side, while the baseball grandstand abutted on the east, accessible by doors leading to a wide walkaround. Fresh breezes from three sides cooled the dancers and onlookers, and a soda fountain provided refreshment. Under the ballroom were the new bowling alleys.

Island Park was an immediate hit and thousands attended the pavilion's offerings for the summer. Its location was ideal. A few hundred yards' walk led patrons from the Brattleboro train station and downtown area over a road





*The grandstand seated 1200 people and was the finest of its kind in the tri-state Connecticut Valley. Most seats were fold-down and armless, costing a quarter, but a few, behind home plate, had arms and could be reserved for fifty cents. This is the Fourth of July game between Brattleboro and Keene in 1911.*

bridge to Island Park's entrance. Two railroads brought fans from up and down the Connecticut Valley. The patrons watched baseball, movies, plays, and vaudeville. They danced, bowled, and strolled on the airy veranda.

#### **Brattleboro's baseball champions**

The Twin State League debuted at the grandstand on June 30 before a capacity crowd, and the Brattleboro Islanders won their first game. An exciting pennant race ensued. The towns were commercial and cultural rivals. They had never been in a professional baseball league together and competition was intense. Large crowds attended Twin State games at Island Park.

After the first game the Islanders played poorly but were rallied by their manager, "Home Run" Breckinridge. His deft maneuvering (he made nine roster changes) improved the team's makeup and enabled the Islanders to win 15 of their last 22 games. During one span of games at Island Park in August, the Islanders held opponents scoreless for 37 consecutive innings. The Islanders' recovery gained them the league lead, competing with archrival Keene for the pennant. Only one game separated the two teams during August, and it remained one game when they met at Island Park on Labor Day to decide the first Twin State League championship.

Thirty-five hundred baseball enthusiasts squeezed into the grandstand, spilled onto the field, lined both foul lines, and encircled the outfield. With a crowd that size, Island Park's vow to present only good, clean fun might have been threatened. Not so, as the *Phoenix* reported:

"More than 500 Keene supporters came to see the game in automobiles and on a special train and Bellows Falls sent a delegation of more than 200. The large crowd was handled without a hitch, there was not a semblance of rowdiness on anybody's part and it was a fitting climax to the two months' race for the leadership of the league."

The *Reformer* said it was the largest crowd to view a baseball game in Vermont history. And the *Phoenix* called it "virtually a perfect game, full of the thrills and uncertainties which makes baseball the greatest popular sport in America."





*The Islanders were the first Twin State champions. By September, only two players remained from the opening roster. Seated on left is John Bosk, winning pitcher of the title game. Later, he suffered seizures and spent a year in an asylum.*

"The gonfalon is ours!" crowed the *Phoenix* when Brattleboro won the pennant, 2 to 0, in a thrilling contest. "It was the game of a lifetime, not settled until the last man was out in the last inning of the last game." There were exciting plays and spectacular catches. It was so exciting, reported the paper, that one Keene man bet all his money and then threw in his coat and hat, losing his clothing as well as his money. In contrast to today's three-hour games, the intense activity of this contest was crammed into one hour and 38 minutes.

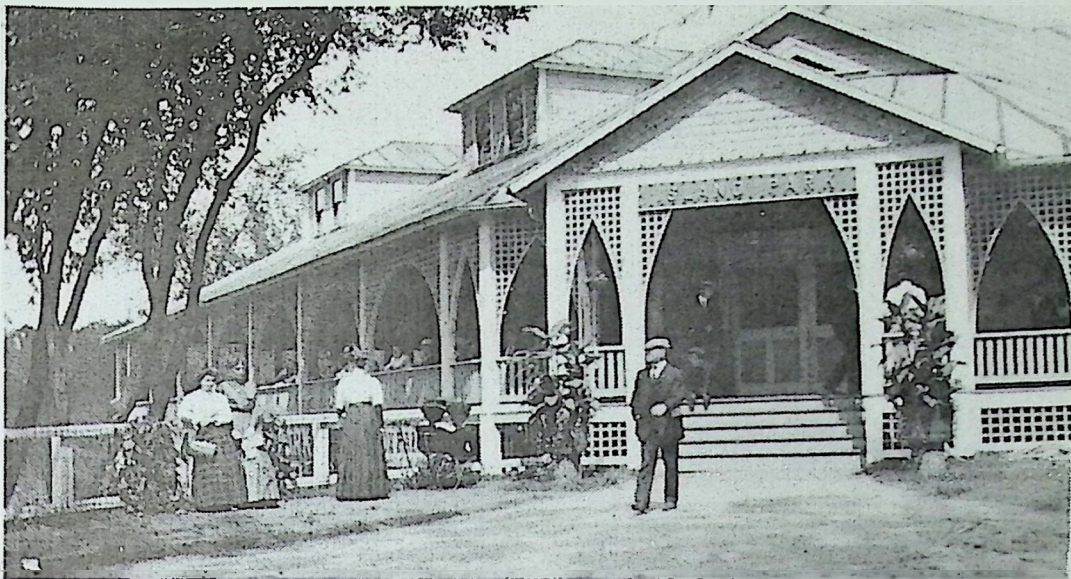
Brattleboro placed the mantle of heroes upon the Islanders' shoulders and acclaimed Breckinridge as the man of the hour.

#### **New England's pleasure palace**

Well, what more could one ask of Island Park's first season? It would appear that Fox and Moran met their goal of a first-class establishment, providing good, clean fun for all, whether single or family. The owners sought to be responsible to their patrons. Large, frequent, front-page ads in the *Phoenix* and the *Reformer* advised readers that only well-behaved customers were welcomed. The ads promoted new events as well as promising more and better offerings. Fox and Moran expanded, adding another lane for bowling and a comfortable cafe to the veranda.

The Islanders' spectacular finish placed the town's name on the lips of

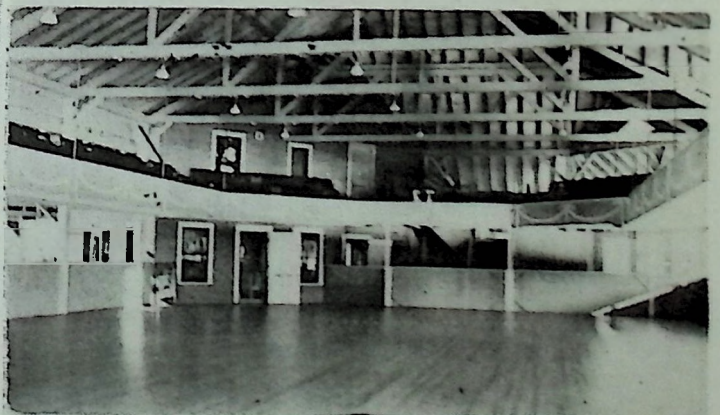




*A popular picture, featured on many of the postcards created for the Island Park Amusement Co. by manufacturers in New Haven, Detroit, and Germany. Postcards were sold from outlets throughout Brattleboro and at Island Park.*

many. And the throng at Island Park on Labor Day indicated that quite a few Connecticut Valley citizens were smitten with baseball, willing to travel miles to watch the sport in a comfortable setting. Compliments during and after the 1911 baseball season were common, as news of the amusement complex swept the Valley.

In August, the *Reformer* spoke of parties of excursionists from Massachusetts being "loud in their praise of the park with its various attractions." Christina Robb of the *Springfield Sunday Republican* wrote an article in September in praise of Island Park and the beauties of Brattleboro. James Gardner of Boston wrote to the *Reformer* in August that Island Park was "a fine baseball park, beautifully and conveniently located." Even Moran's undertaking association got into the act. The *Marcellus Monthly Medium's* September edition boasted that Moran's "side interest" is "well calculated to meet the popular demand for a recreation spot" and provided "every convenience possible . . . for the comfort and pleasure of visitors."



*The soda fountain, left, was located in the Island Road wing, and was said to serve "the best possible" ice cream. The ballroom, right, was between the veranda and the grandstand, with seats in the balcony for non-dancing events.*





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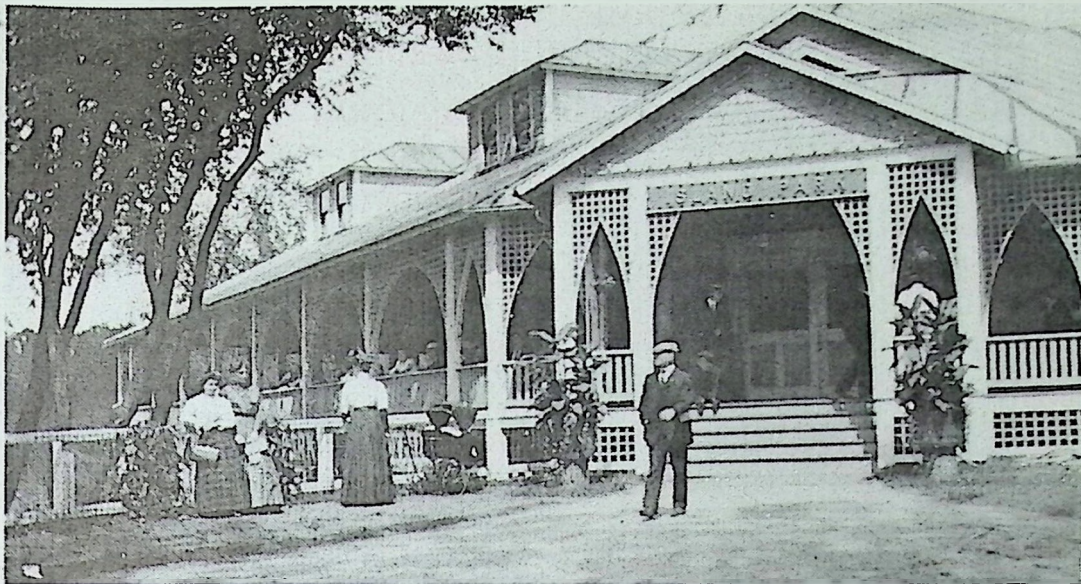
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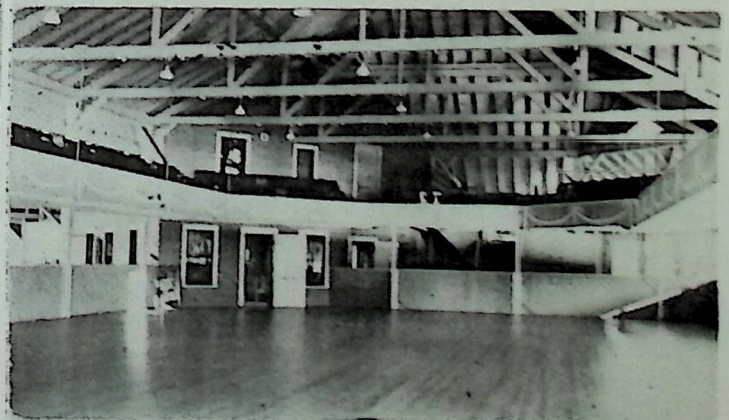




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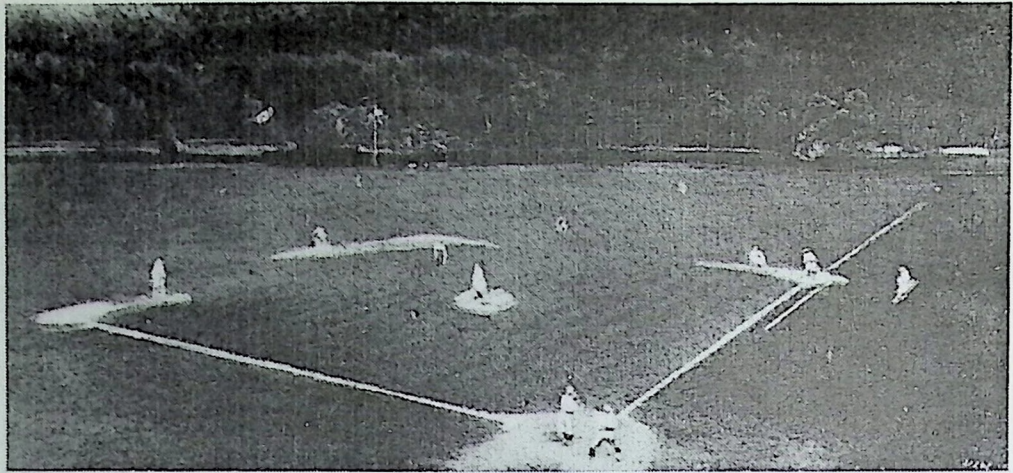
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*This postcard view of a game in progress was taken from the pavilion roof.*

It was especially sweet to hear approval from rivals. The Keene *Cheshire Republican* proclaimed in July that visitors will "gasp" at sight of the pavilion. It lauded Fox and Moran for "providing a proper setting" for baseball. But, rivals being rivals, the paper concluded with barbed praise: "and if Brattleborians do not appreciate their efforts every man, woman and child in that beautiful burg should be sentenced to 60 days in some less favored locale."

Success was exciting and Island Park's owners contemplated extending their reach beyond Brattleboro. The *Reformer* reported on October 10, 1911, that the Island Park Amusement Company filed papers with the Vermont secretary of state in which the company "organizes with a capital of \$50,000 to buy, sell, lease and rent lands and maintain buildings for amusement in Vermont and New Hampshire."

The first year of operation was sensational for Island Park and the pleasant transformation of an unsavory parcel of land into an amusement Elysian Field did not go unnoticed. When at year's end the *Reformer* boasted of Brattleboro's achievements for 1911, it took pride in what Fox and Moran had done with New Hampshire's island:

"Though the property stands on New Hampshire soil, no one will deny that Island Park, the biggest summer amusement enterprise in Vermont, really is a part of Brattleboro – a local industry conceived, financed and built by Brattleboro men."

### **Baseball diamonds don't last forever**

Prosperity for Island Park continued and in 1912 it was the site for the Brattleboro Pageant, a celebration of 150 years of Brattleboro history. But the Islanders' 1911 baseball championship was never matched. The Islanders were mediocre in 1912, 1913, and 1914, rarely contending for the league's lead. As the caliber of baseball declined, the crowds diminished also. Kinsella may have said they will come, but former Chicago White Sox owner and baseball promoter Bill Veeck would have added: only if you're a winner.

Island Park continued to present Twin State League baseball but the League's importance to Brattleboro waned. In 1914, after a thousand fans saw the Islanders lose to Newport on opening day, the team played poorly. They could not be rallied, and "Home Run" Breckinridge was fired. There was a brief revival and enthusiasm returned. On July 30 an impromptu parade of 200 fans, a hastily collected drum corps, and a "tally ho" led a parade up Main Street after a rousing victory at Island Park. Unfortunately, the Islanders



# Official Score Card

Price Five Cents ISLAND PARK Price Five Cents

**MAKE A HIT**  
AND BUY YOUR  
Suit, Hat and Furnishings  
FROM  
**E. E. PERRY & CO.**

**QUALITY LEADS**  
PICTURE FRAMING, PAINTING, AND  
INTERIOR DECORATING  
Complete Stock of Paints, Wall Paper and Mouldings  
If you wish satisfactory results call at  
**HERTZBERG BROS.**  
Phone 338-M 8 High Street

**W. T. MOONEY**  
PLUMBING, HEATING  
AND TINNING  
Phone 338-W 8 High Street

**Brattleboro Steam Laundry**  
W. K. SPARKS, Prop.  
First Class Work Our Only Specialty  
10 Flat Street Phone 72

After the Game stop at  
**Hoodley's Cafe, 9 Main St.**  
For Lunch or a Regular Meal  
For Ladies or Gentlemen  
MEALS SERVED AT ALL HOURS

**CARL F. CAIN**  
**Merchant Tailor**  
Covered Buttons Made  
117 Main St. Opp. Brooks House

Come out of the High Price  
District for everything for  
HOUSEKEEPING  
**DUNTON** 16 Flat Street

**MANLEY BROS.**  
Headquarters for everything in the  
**Auto Line**  
LIVERY WORK A SPECIALTY

When in need of a New Shoe try  
**C. L. KAYE**  
FOR YOUR NEXT PAIR  
**REPAIRING**  
34 Elliot Street Brattleboro

AFTER THE GAME IS OVER GO TO  
**Regali & Regali**  
For your Ice Cream and Soda  
FINE LINE OF CONFECTIONERY  
FRUITS OF ALL KINDS  
65 Main Street Phone 333-W

**BUZZELL, 20 Elliot Street**  
Home Made Ice Cream  
CONFECTIONERY OF ALL KINDS  
Home of Crispettes  
FRESH EVERY DAY  
Visit our Ice Cream Parlor and let us prove our "is Best"

**The Albany Cafe**  
EVERYTHING IN ITS SEASON  
OPEN AT ALL HOURS  
Victor Black Main Street

**At Island Park**

THE ICE CREAM IS THE BEST POSSIBLE AND THE SURROUNDINGS  
THE MOST ATTRACTIVE  
— TRY IT —

Tuesday Afternoon, August 6

SEASON 1912

KEENE																	SUMMARY		
PLAYERS	POS.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	AB	R	TR	O	A	E	SB
KAYERS	CF												4			3			
ROBAN	MR												3			2			
DONOVAN	MR												3			2			
PEPLOSNI	P												3	1	1				
DURGIN	SS												3			1			
OSTERGREN	MR												2			13			
FISH	C												2			2			
CROOK	LF												2						
PROCTOR	MR												3	1	1				
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BRATTLEBORO																	SUMMARY		
PLAYERS	POS.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	AB	R	TR	O	A	E	SB
CROW	CF												3	1	1	1			
C. CROWTHER	LF												2	1	1	2			
SNELL	C												2			2			
F. CROWTHER	SS												2						
GLADDEEN	MR												2			1			
JACOBS	MR												3	1	1	3			
DAYES	SS												2						
DONNELLY	MR												2			1			
Mahalan or O'Toole	P												3						
													2	1	5	7	7	0	
Two Base Hits																			
Three Base Hit																			
Home Runs																			
Double Plays																			
Strike Out by																			
Strike Out by																			
Base on Balls Call																			
Base on Balls Call																			
Hit by Pitched Ball																			
Wild Pitch																			
Passed Balls																			
Time of Game																			
Umpire																			

Friday Afternoon, August 9, at 3.30, Bellows Falls vs. Brattleboro

lapsed back to mediocrity and attendance plummeted again. Only 200 "frozen-in-the-ice" fans witnessed the final home game of the 1914 season.

In fact, attendance slumped throughout the league. "A small crowd that refused to enthuse" was the description of an audience in Greenfield. Another at Northampton was the smallest crowd ever to watch a Twin State game there. The sparse receipts could not sustain the yearly breaking of the salary limit, and the baseball associations went into debt. The *Barre Times* asserted that, though the baseball may be good, "it may be too high class for the town's pocketbooks."

At season's end the BBA, in debt again, expressed disgust with widespread disregard for the salary limit. The Association informed the Twin State League that it might not return for the 1915 season unless certain conditions were enforced.

By 1915, enthusiasm in Brattleboro for Twin State League baseball as a medium to convey the town's progressive spirit had dropped. Contrast the *Reformer's* front page boast in 1911: "And let it be said right here and now a few flailhandlers to the contrary notwithstanding, that the boys who are to wear the Brattleboro uniform are a likely looking lot — clean, manly young fellows, full of pepper and anxious to represent well a town which they seem to think is a pretty good place in which to summer" with an editorial comment in 1915 in reaction to Claremont's decision to select players from the Islanders' 1914 roster for Claremont's 1915 Twin State team. If they did, said the *Reformer*, "they would have the finest array of moss agates in a diamond setting to be found in New England."

How could things have gotten so bad? What caused this change of attitude from pride to derision?



### **Conflict clouds the future**

Besides mediocre teams, three conditions caused this change of opinion: the transient nature of the BBA, baseball as business, and the rivalry of the Twin State's towns.

First, the Brattleboro Baseball Association was not permanent. It elected officers at the beginning of each season for a term of one year to operate and fund the Islanders. Some years' electees were better with finances than others, and an odd pattern developed in the financial workings of the association. Every good year was followed by a bad one. In 1911 there was a surplus, in 1912 a debt, in 1913 a surplus, and 1914 brought debt again. Each season the BBA raised funds by galas and subscription to clear any debts and build a nest egg. The process became fatiguing. Eventually, rifts developed among the baseball enthusiasts and business subscribers when debts rose and success decreased.

Second, as much as baseball was sport to the BBA, it was also a business. As such, expenses had to match revenues. Costs were rising, especially travel and salaries. Every season, the BBA confronted two vexing haggles: one with the Twin State League's associations, and the other with rental fees at Island Park.

The Twin State hassle dealt with the size and makeup of the league and the weekly salary limit. Originally a four-team league, the Twin State expanded in 1913 to six teams. By 1914 it had had three geographic restructurings involving eight towns. The BBA wanted a smaller, compact league to lower travel expenses and a firm salary limit with effective controls and penalties. The league's associations resented the BBA's insistent demands and accused it of trying to dominate the league. In the end the Twin State League always approved a salary ceiling but the rule was easily evaded.

The BBA's hassle with Fox and Moran involved rental fees for Island Park. The BBA thought the fees should be lowered so it could have a better chance to operate the Islanders in the black. Island Park's owners said the fees were fair. A compromise was always struck, but each year the dickering raised hackles.

Finally, the one condition that caused the most conflict was the very one that had brought the associations together – the rivalry of the towns. The baseball competition was frustrating because it was both a source of vitality and a wellspring of rancor. The Twin State League strove to exploit the natural antagonism of the Connecticut Valley's mill and commercial towns. The baseball was competent and the competition ardent. The league would have succeeded if the towns learned to respect each other, but they never did. The towns wanted baseball, but they also wanted to win.

Antagonisms played out over each season, and the bickering was interminable, especially over the salary limit. Most of the players in the league were local. Competition for their services was fierce, especially towards the end of the season when other leagues broke up and good players became available. A strong addition to the roster at this time could mean the pennant. Every year the agreed-upon salary limit was breached and every year baseball became more expensive.

### **The rogue river**

In addition to the above troubles, there was a wildcard for the BBA and Island Park – the Connecticut River. Frequent floods ravaged the island. Fox and Moran knew the Connecticut River was a problem when Fox secured an





*The island was flooded almost every year after 1912, when the Vernon Dam was completed. Winter thaws also could cause ice damage, as in 1915 when the north wing of the pavilion's grandstand was demolished.*

option for development on the island after buying it for the Connecticut River Power Company in 1907. Fox knew the completion of the power company's Vernon Dam, 20 miles downriver, would raise the river, covering part of the island and flooding the ballfield in the spring.

Island Park's owners planned for this. They erected Island Park on concrete piers higher than any height the river had ever reached in flood. But it wasn't high enough. By 1912, floods and the completion of the dam that year had reduced the island's area from 30 acres to five. More importantly, the dam backed up the river, creating a mini-lake and raising the water level. Consequently, spring floods exceeded previous high water marks.

The river flooded the island in 1912 (twice), 1913, and 1914, damaging the pavilion, piers, and field. Each time Fox and Moran made repairs and reseeded the baseball field. However, in February 25, 1915, an ice flood destroyed the north wing of the wooden grandstand, demolished several piers, lifted the pavilion off others, and warped the dance floor. This time the owners did not know if they would repair.

### **1915: The decisive year**

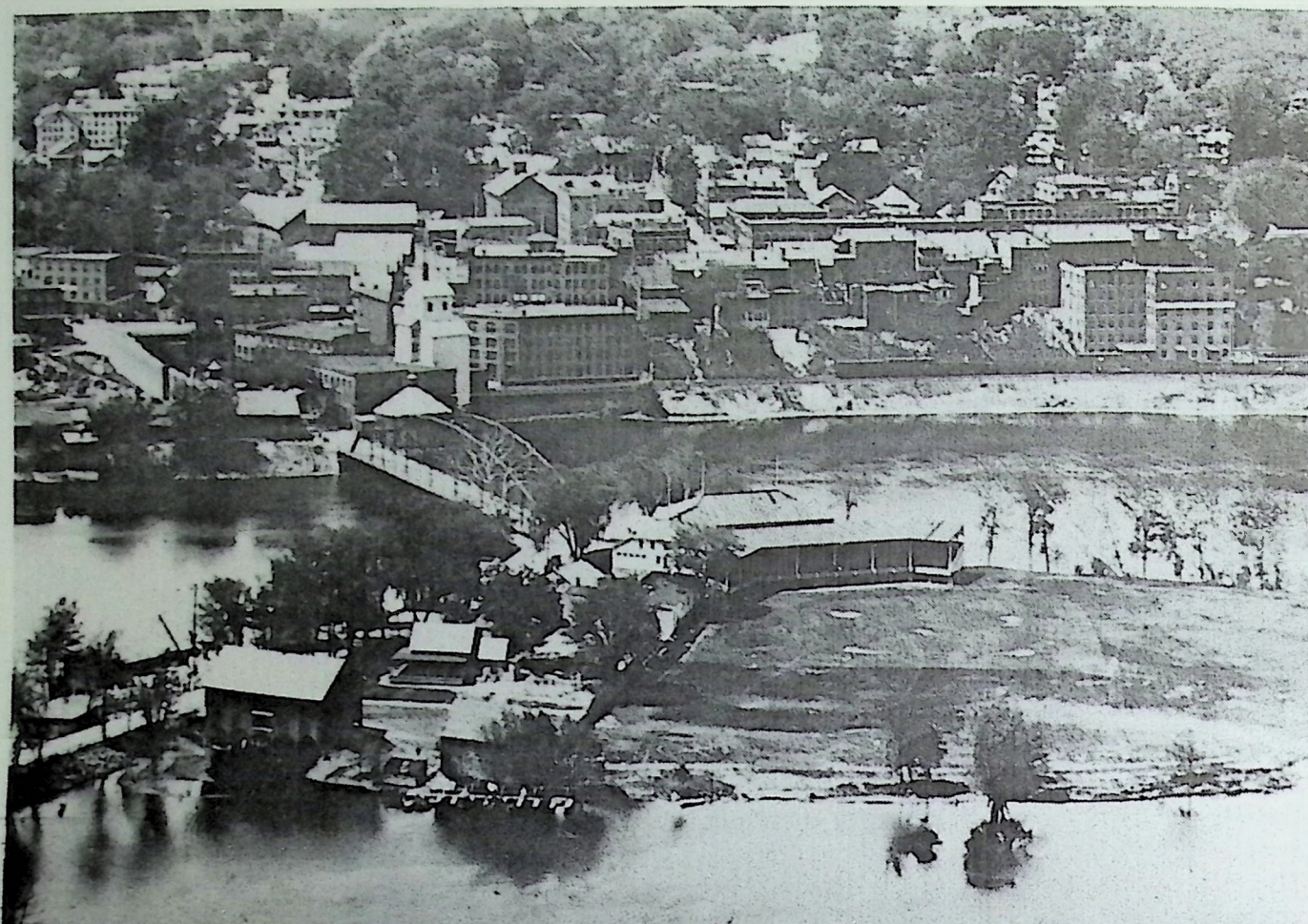
The conditions of 1911-14 came together in 1915, in events decisive for Island Park's baseball future. Prospects for baseball in New England that year were not healthy. In February, the *Bennington Banner* asserted that the baseball mania of the last few years had abated. The paper gave as examples the Eastern Association and the Twin State League, struggling to hold their respective organizations together.

Also in February, the *Phoenix* commented on the strain of increasing costs for the sport. It stated that the Twin State League's ills stemmed from the associations' reluctance to coordinate their aims with the health of the league. The paper said the emphasis on a win-at-all-costs spirit inhibited good business judgment. It urged a reorganization of the league with an independent president and strict enforcement of the salary limit.

At the first subscribers' meeting of 1915, on March 11, the BBA's attitude coincided with that of the *Phoenix*. The meeting began a chain of circumstances that would affect league baseball on the island and Island Park's place in the story of Brattleboro's progressive spirit.

Frustrated with the Twin State's inability to enforce the salary limit, the BBA empowered Moran to convey their demands to the league. The Twin





By around 1914 the island was barely large enough for a baseball field. Compare this view to the ones on page 4.

State League rejected Brattleboro's demands and the BBA responded by voting itself out of the league. The BBA felt so strongly about it that they voted to disband and founded another association – the Brattleboro Athletic Association. This association was empowered to found a new league with Bellows Falls, Keene, and Greenfield, Massachusetts.

Unfortunately, the Athletic Association's plans fell through because of poor support for a new league. The BAA's president, George Sherman, said on March 22 that he declined to meet with the three towns about a new league because baseball in Brattleboro was "in too unsettled a state" for a representative of the town to attend. He told the *Reformer*:

"There are plenty in town who want baseball and many who believe it is a good time to drop out of league games for a year. It is noticeable that there are not many men of affairs who appear to be willing to associate themselves actively with the game."

This unsettled state resulted in a turmoil of plans and intentions that saw the new association: seek to form a local league, complain about Island Park's fees, reapply to the Twin State (rejected again), and search for an alternative site when they realized Island Park was too badly damaged for baseball.

Although circumstances were different from other years (Island Park's ice damage), the stumbling concerning baseball, Brattleboro, and the Twin State in 1915 seemed endless. And it continued for two months until the Athletic



Association voted on June 4 in a meeting at the Brooks House to form a local league, funded by patron fees and subscriptions gathered by the BAA. Games would be played at the Valley Fairgrounds, the site where Brattleboro High School now stands.

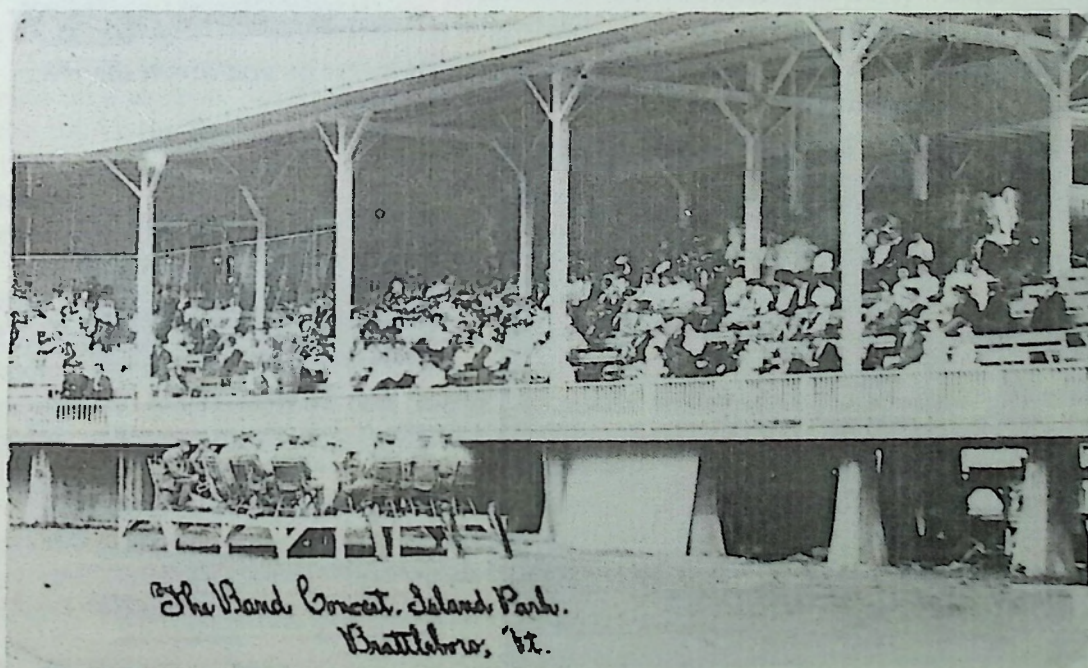
In the interim, several attempts to form a local, amateur league or a new, professional league or to reapply to the Twin State bore no fruit or were rejected. The mismanagement of the process was sure to create acrimony, and did. Righteous reprimands and demeaning accusations were hurled up and down the Valley and the "moss agates" quote was part of a volley from Brattleboro.

### Guest Day

By June, Island Park had repaired the dance floor and the piers but did not replace the demolished grandstand wing. The local league played its games at the Valley Fairgrounds and the Twin State League opened without the Islanders. It was generally acknowledged that the league was weaker without Brattleboro and many thought it would not last the season.

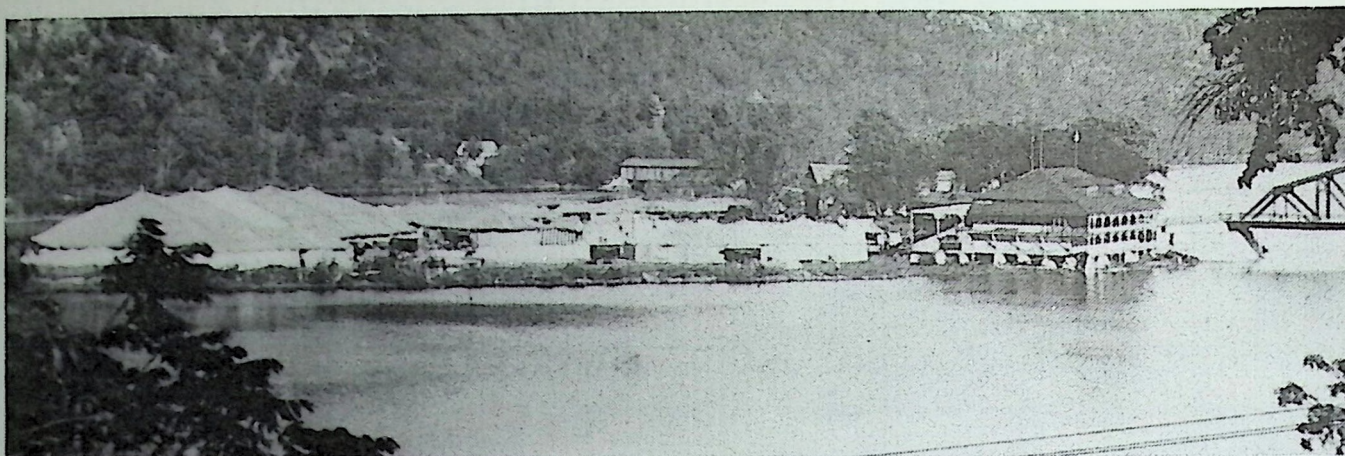
Nevertheless, with no Twin State baseball at Island Park, Brattleboro's most influential symbol of progress was faced with a loss of prestige and attention. The free publicity from Island Park's participation in a baseball league was gone.

The owners, however, were troupers and tried to recover attention by aggressive advertising and special events for 1915. Circuses and carnivals appeared more frequently. A Fourth of July fireworks show ("The finest Fireworks Exhibition ever shown in southern Vermont") was marketed with a public relations ploy. Ads urged any residents who could not afford the admission to declare so and Island Park would admit them free. "There are no

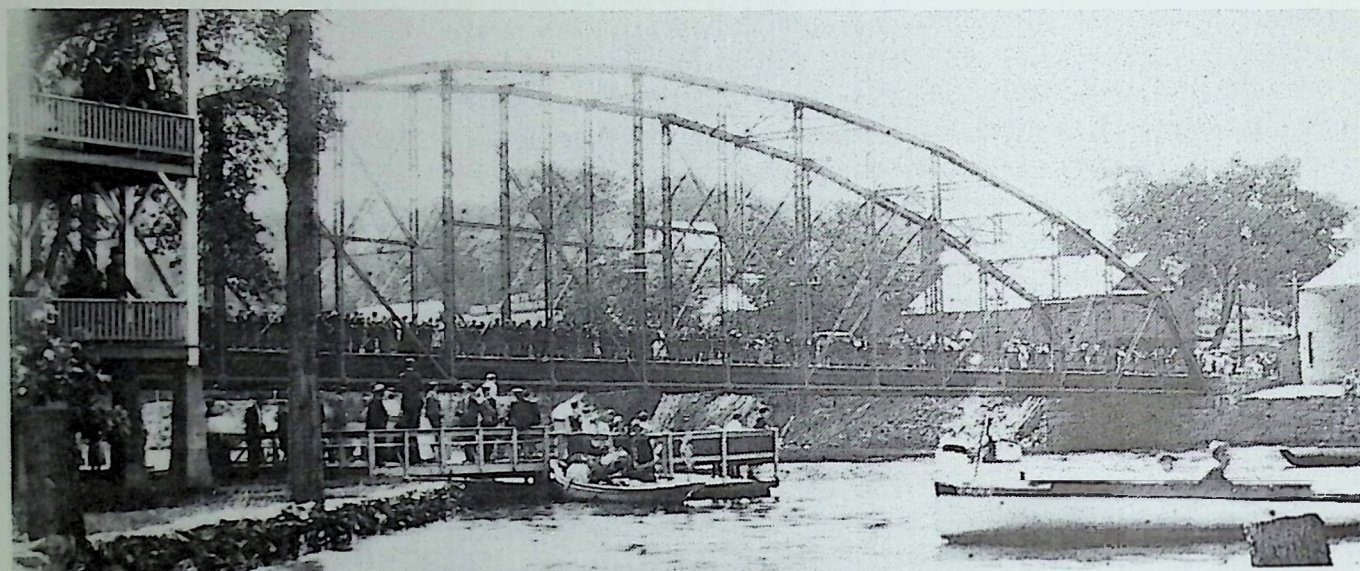


*Portable stages made it possible to present many non-baseball events to large crowds in the grandstand. Movies at night were a favorite, as well as plays, vaudeville, and concerts.*

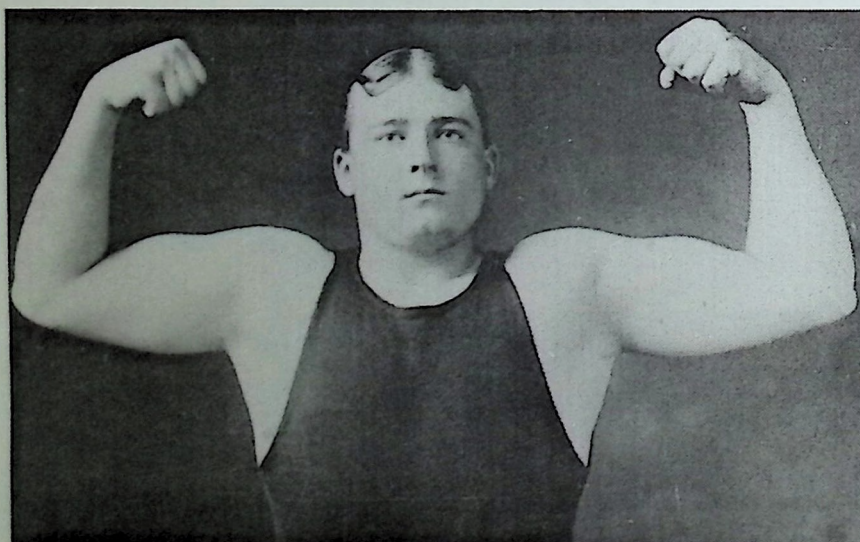




There had been circuses on the island before Island Park, and they continued on the ballground, especially after the demise of baseball. Convenience to the railroad station allowed up to ten circuses to visit Brattleboro in the summer. (Photo by George H. Clapp)



Boat races and regattas were held on the Connecticut, and sightseers could travel up and down the river or around the island from the boat landing at Island Park.



**TONIGHT**  
**FOR THE STATE CHAMPIONSHIP**  
**AT CATCH WEIGHTS**  
**George W. Bailey vs. Cyclone Mattson**

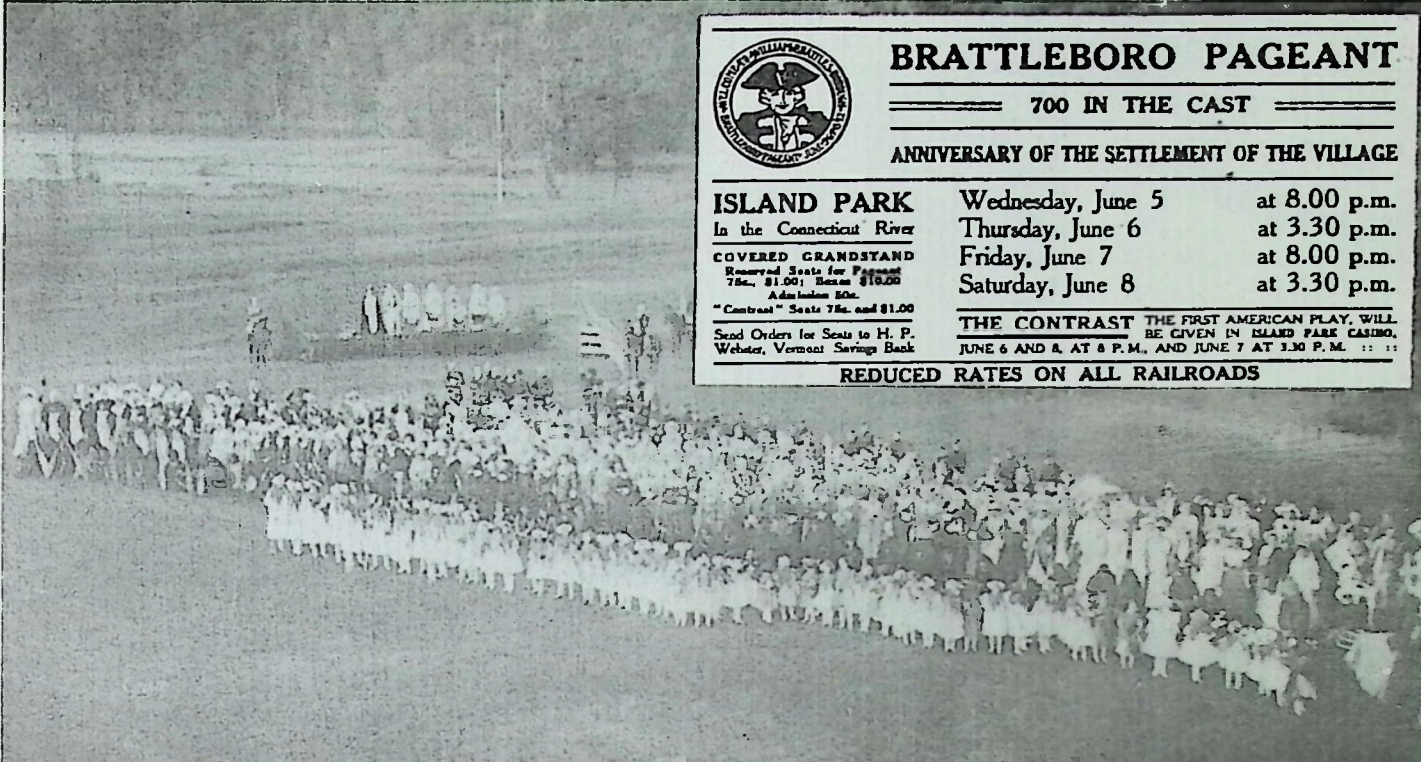
Mattson has wrestled in over 100 matches in the past three years and Bailey has had a lot of experience with good wrestlers since seen on the mat in Brattleboro. Jim Barnes of Springfield, Mass., will referee - so fair play is assured.

As a preliminary YOUNG CAVANAUGH will go against BUD DOWLEY. Both are active and strong and have had experience.

Preliminary at 8 p. m. Main Bout at 8.30

Wrestling was popular in the fall and winter, baseball's off-season. Island Park promoted state and local champions, such as Brattleboro's Strong Boy, George "Farmer" Bailey. The matches were held in the ballroom, with its balcony seating.





# BRATTLEBORO PAGEANT

## 700 IN THE CAST

### ANNIVERSARY OF THE SETTLEMENT OF THE VILLAGE

<b>ISLAND PARK</b> In the Connecticut River	Wednesday, June 5	at 8.00 p.m.
	Thursday, June 6	at 3.30 p.m.
<b>COVERED GRANDSTAND</b> Reserved Seats for Pageant 75c., \$1.00; Boxes \$10.00 Admission 50c.	Friday, June 7	at 8.00 p.m.
	Saturday, June 8	at 3.30 p.m.

"Contrast" Seats 75c. and \$1.00  
Send Orders for Seats to H. P. Webster, Vermont Savings Bank

**THE CONTRAST** THE FIRST AMERICAN PLAY, WILL BE GIVEN IN ISLAND PARK CASINO, JUNE 6 AND 8, AT 8 P.M., AND JUNE 7 AT 3.30 P.M. 11 11

REDUCED RATES ON ALL RAILROADS

*With its cast of 700 depicting 150 years of Brattleboro history, the Pageant was the most prestigious non-baseball event at Island Park. This view from the grandstand was taken in 1912.*

'strings' on this offer, for we want everyone in Brattleboro with us that night," said one ad.

Island Park continued to present vaudeville shows, movies, dances, and circuses successfully throughout the summer. Fox and Moran appeared to have recovered nicely from the dual misfortunes of grandstand destruction and no league baseball. But what about Island Park's future as Brattleboro's symbol of progress? How could it maintain its role with the town's progressive spirit?

George Fox's Board of Trade presented Brattleboro and Island Park with a new way to show public spirit. Led by Horton Walker (secretary-treasurer of the BAA), the Board organized a most progressive solution. On August 20, 1915 they sponsored a unique promotion in which Island Park was prominently featured. "Guest Day" was Brattleboro's show of appreciation for everyone in the Connecticut Valley.

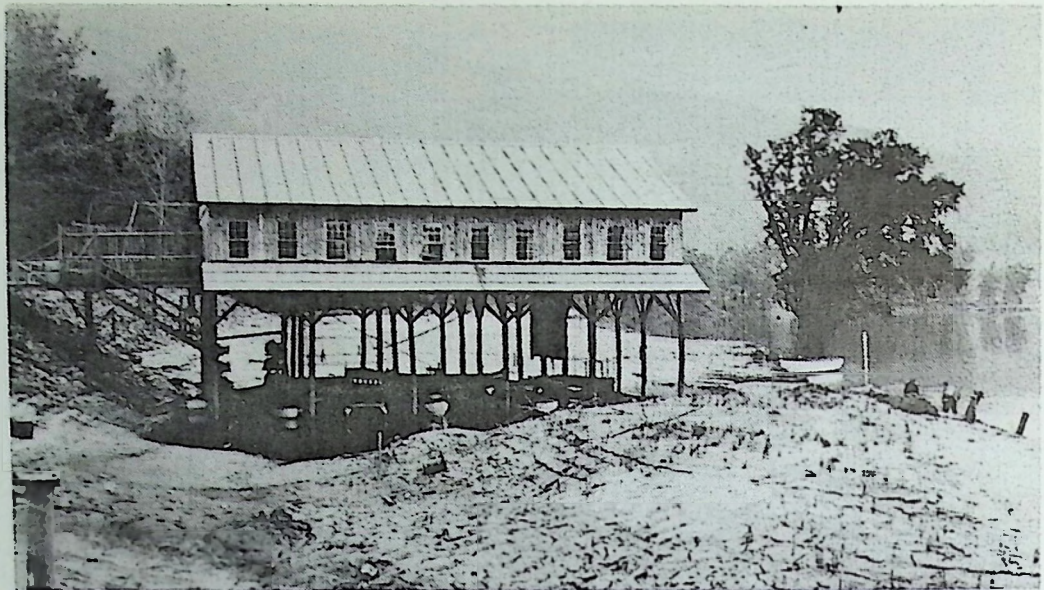
Guest Day was promoted throughout the Valley. Special railroad rates and free feed and stables for animals were offered to anyone who came to Brattleboro that day for a plethora of free events (and free transportation to them) in different locations about the town. Guest Day drew three thousand people and was a great success. Island Park was crowded all day, with two band concerts, a baseball game, and a wrestling match to hold people's interests.

Guest Day proved to be so popular, that the Board of Trade announced plans for an annual event. Island Park's place in the fabric of Brattleboro's progressive spirit would remain with bigger, better events planned for Guest Day 1916 and beyond.

### Epilogue and epitaph

League, professional baseball never dignified the ballfield and grandstand of Island Park again. The Twin State League collapsed after the 1915 season. It





*Built on stilts, photographer Hayes Bigelow's boathouse could cope with floods on the island. Boats stored inside were lowered by winches into a channel cut in the riverbank. Bigelow Boats offered tours upriver to Putney for 35 cents roundtrip and down to Vernon and Hinsdale for 50 cents.*

was not revived nor replaced and the advantage of free publicity for Island Park in a pennant race disappeared. The local league returned in 1916 when the BAA mended fences with Moran and Fox. However, the amateur brand of baseball presented by the owners and the BAA failed to draw many paying spectators. Attempts to widen the BAA's appeal, including baseball on the Sabbath, floundered. After a few years the Brattleboro Athletic Association vanished.

Island Park reopened for summer gaiety each season but competition from theaters in Brattleboro and the lack of league baseball limited its draw to circuses, reunions, dances, and special events such as championship wrestling. Guest Day could be held only one day of the year and Island Park was only a part of that gala. The one-day commemoration could never replace 25 to 30 days of baseball games.

Island Park still billed itself as the Home of Clean Amusement and the



*Winter activities on the frozen river included skating, motorcycling (see photo at left by Benjamin A. Crown), and iceboat racing. Note the piers of the pavilion in the background of the 1928 photo at right.*

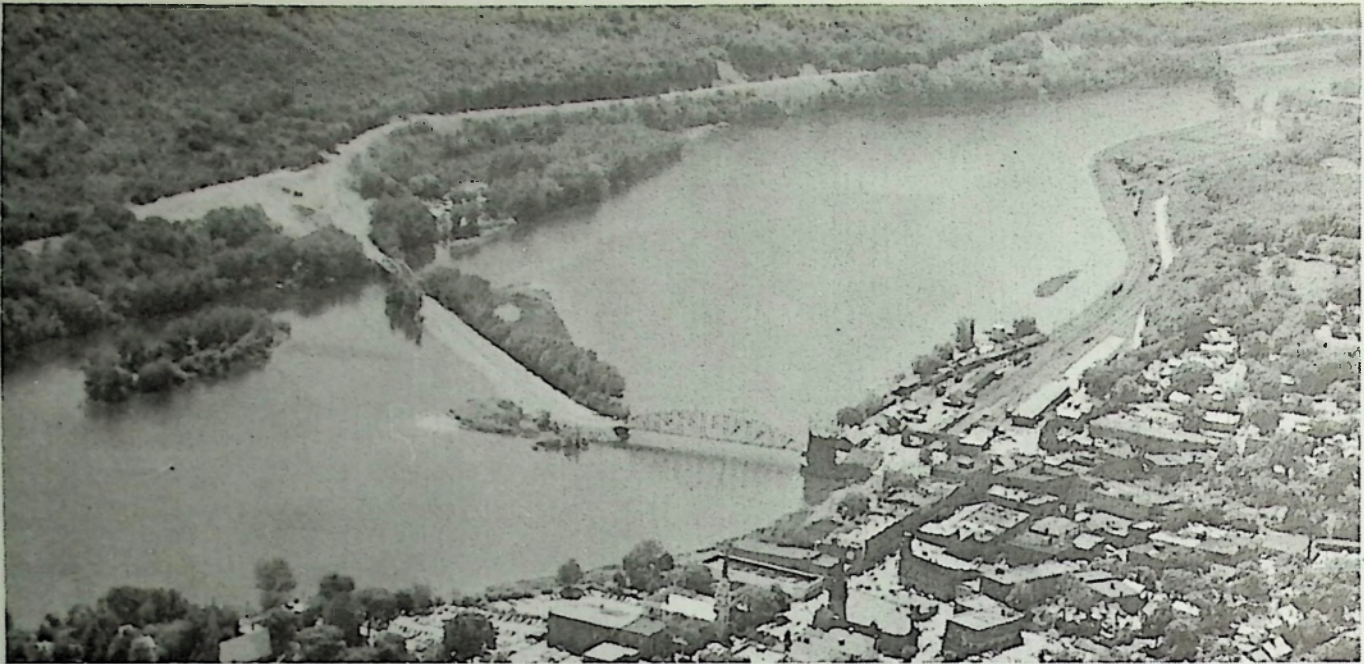




*The flood of November 1927 was one of the worst in Connecticut Valley history. Damage to Island Park was extensive and fatal. It was torn down six months later.*







*The floods of 1927 and 1936 reduced the island to a shadow of its former self.*

island continued to be more graced with the summer lights of the pavilion than by the dark glimmer of a shady past. But the brilliance of the bright, shining star of 1911 started to fade.

Each season's maintenance was costly as the river steadily pummeled the pavilion. Management dropped a notch when ownership changed hands with the death of Fox in 1918 (ads that summer were small and confusing). Island Park was closed for two seasons when another ice flood in 1920 rendered more damage and isolated the island from Brattleboro by destroying the bridge.

In the 1920s, automobiles took area residents much farther afield than the island for their pleasure pursuits. Dances and special balls held limited appeal. Times had changed. In 1927, the *Reformer* noted the quietest Fourth of July in Brattleboro history, including at the site of the 1915 fireworks display. "Island Park," said the paper, "was deserted."

And the river eventually killed it. A catastrophic flood in November, 1927, wrecked the Connecticut Valley watershed. The flood damaged Island Park so severely that the owners, the Connecticut River Power Company, demolished the battered structure in the spring of 1928. The island itself almost disappeared in the great flood of 1936.

All that remains now of "New England's Resort" and the "Home of Clean Amusement" are several battered, dirty piers beside the tiny island. Piers that once tried, and failed, to hold Island Park above the not-so-amusing Connecticut River.



